

What is the Third Satipatthana?

Mahabodhi

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open to all

There seems to be some divergence of opinion about exactly what is the third **satipatthana - Citta**, and maybe connected to that perhaps some reticence to 'unpack' the concept (the chapters in books on the satipatthanas tend to be quite short in covering **citta** in comparison those on the other satipatthanas. In Analayo's **Satipatthana** and in Bhante's **Living with Awareness** the sections on **citta** are each only 8 pages long). So I think the concept could be unpacked a bit more. Let's look then at a few sources:

* The **Pali-English Dictionary** suggests citta is heart / mind, and emphasizing it is more the emotive side of mind as opposed to **manas** as the intellect or mind-sense in the sense of what grasps mental objects (**dhammas**).

* **Analayo** follows the PED: "**Citta...usually refers to "mind" in the conative and emotional sense, in the sense of one's mood or state of mind**" [**conation** - The exertion of willing that desire or aversion shall issue in action. From L. **conari** to try - **Concise OED**]

* In **Analayo's** chapter on 'Mind' (**citta**):
"the task of mindfulness is to remain receptively aware by clearly recognizing the state of mind that underlies a particular train of thoughts or reactions";
..... he further refers to the **"....honest acknowledgement of the existence of hidden emotions, motives, and tendencies in the mind..."**

* **Bhikkhu Bodhi**: "**Citta signifies mind as the centre of personal experience, as the subject of thought, volition and emotion**" [Note: subject of ...]

* In the **Theravada**, meditation is sometimes known as **citta bhavana**.

* The **Satipatthana Sutta** lists examples of **citta**: lustful, hateful, deluded, distracted, concentrated, liberated.

What about sources in the FWBO?

* **Sona** abbreviated **citta** to thought on a poster for a day retreat on the satipatthanas, but when I asked him about that he said it was more broadly 'mental events'.

* **Vidyamala** introduced **citta** as 'emotion and thought', at a Taraloka retreat on the Satipatthanas.

* **Bhante's** chapter headings for the sections on **citta** and **dhammas** (covering the hindrances section) in

Living with Awareness are respectively 'Understanding' and 'Reflecting'

* **Bhante** dismisses the Theravada translation of **bodhicitta as** 'thought of enlightenment' as inadequate, instead preferring 'will to enlightenment'. [which is in line with **conation** - willing]

* **Bhante** covers reflexive self-consciousness in the chapter on **dhammas** in **Living with Awareness**, not in the chapter on **citta**:

The ability to make consciousness reflexive - to become aware that we are aware, to know that we know You don't just experience sensual desire, you know that you experience it

Citta and Dhammas

I started out this exploration with a sense of frustration. After all I am trying to write a book on mindfulness and although there is a lot of overlap in these definitions, some of the views seem to be conflicting. There wasn't a clear schema that included both **citta** and **dhammas** (mental objects). I personally haven't felt that satisfied at some of the explanations I have seen of them. It sometimes has felt like the third and fourth satipatthanas have got to some degree 'mixed up' with each other. For instance reflexive self-consciousness I think belongs more to the third satipatthana (**citte cittanupassi** - 'contemplating the mind in and of itself') than the fourth satipatthana, as Bhante has it in **Living with Awareness**.

Of course some people might think 'So what, so long as everything gets covered, what does it matter'. In some ways they may be right, after all what is important is that we practice the four satipatthanas, but equally I think it is also important that we can conceptualise them correctly. If we are not clear when explaining a topic, that is if we do not have confidence in our clarity, then it is unlikely people will have confidence in us, on some level. Perhaps on the level of the intellect. I can't help but thinking that somehow it does matter where we categorise things. It is a question of clarity, lucidity. Perhaps it matters in terms of the fetter of vagueness. It is interesting that the doctrine follower (for whom I presume lucidity is important) is 'ranked' below the stream entrant (who I presume possesses lucidity) but above the faith follower (for whom lucidity might be less of an issue). And this might be a statement that amounts to the same thing as saying that practice is always fortified by insight. Or that practice and insight are foundations underneath each other.

I think though it is easy to see how confusion might happen when trying to sort out the third and fourth satipatthanas. There are two basic reasons. The first is related to **prattica samutpada**.

Conditioned Coproduction

Coming from a western philosophical tradition it is easy to slip unconsciously, when talking about the various phenomena of existence, into materialist / object-oriented views. In this case to treat **citta** and **dhammas** as objects. Is citta **emotion**, or is it **thought**? What is **it**? This tendency to 'objectify' what is essentially more part of a process can get us into trouble. If we look more closely at Conditioned Coproduction, the way the Buddha expresses it is in terms of 'conditioning' relationships, in terms of links:

Fig. 1 Conditioning of Heart / Mind

- * conditioned by contact, feeling;
- * conditioned by feeling, craving

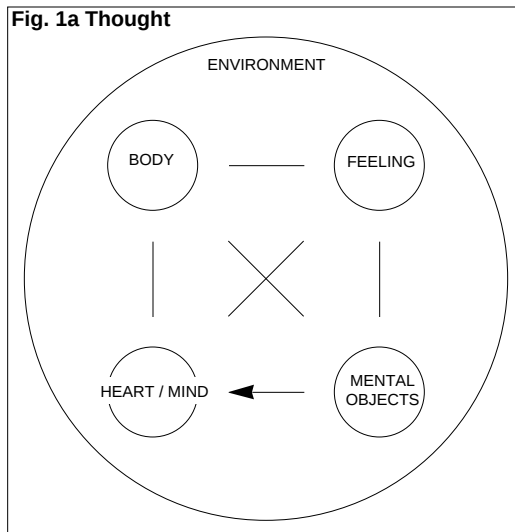
Feeling arises because of certain conditions. It is also possible to have different types of feeling arising in dependence on different types of condition (for instance the condition of having a body, the condition of having mental contents):

- * mental activity being, mental feeling becomes
-*cetasika vedana*
- * physicality being, physical feeling becomes
-*kayika vedana*
- * unwholesome / wholesome state of mind being, worldly / spiritual feeling becomes
-*samisa / niramisa vedana*

So asking the question "What is Citta ?" it may be mistaken to look for one thing. 'Is it heart or is it mind?' Well it can be heart and mind. To accurately express the dharma conceptually it needs to be expressed this way, which reflects *praticca samutpada*. Applying this argument to *citta* then, there can be different types of *citta* (or *citta* represents a different process) depending on what it is being conditioned by. Under different conditions, we might say *citta* takes up a different 'shape': the shape of a thought, the shape of an emotion, the shape of non-discursive awareness (Fig.1)

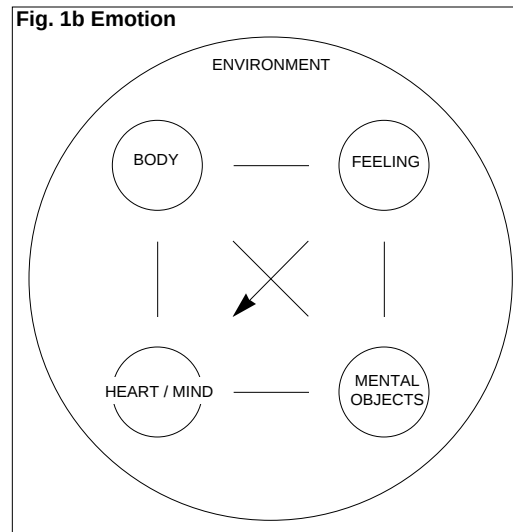
The second reason confusion might arise is related to the first. Because of *praticca samutpada*, when we look at the texts of

Fig. 1a Thought



the different sections, they will contain factors that condition ("*This* being") and factors that are subject to that conditioning ("*that* becomes") and it is important for clarity to distinguish which is which. The conditioning that is being applied, and the 'object of application'. So if the 'object of application' is a state of mind, like in the fourth satipatthana where the practitioner "contemplates the *dhammas* in the *dhammas* in the case of the five hindrances", that doesn't mean that a mental object equates to a state of mind, but that a state of mind (here a hindrance) is simply the 'object of application' that the operation 'mental object' is being applied to. If fact we might say the 'substance' of the hindrance is *citta*, but the name applied to it, 'hindrance', is a *dhamma*, and further, reflecting on the conditioned nature of 'hindrance' is *contemplating the dhamma in the dhamma*, and that process gradually moves one to a perception of the nature of reality. The process of listening, reflecting and meditating takes place within *citta* but the wise 'objectification' of phenomena as *anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha* takes place within *dhammas*.

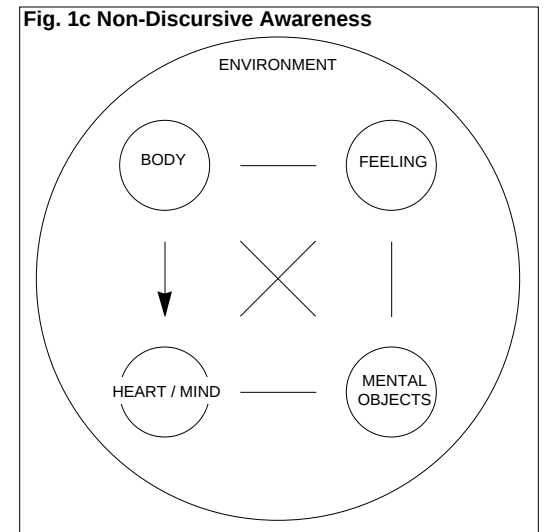
Fig. 1b Emotion



I think we can sort out the confusion if we think of the **content** going on in the heart / mind as *dhammas* and the **shape of the heart / mind that is 'holding' that content** as *citta*. I think things then become plainer.

Let us take a thought (Fig.1a). Mental objects (*dhammas*) are something like the contents of the thought - "The cat sat on the mat" - that represents an assessment or view. However, to the extent that the thought is a movement within the psyche, the thought also takes place within *citta*. The content conditions a certain psychological movement, which we experience as a thought. Put in terms of *praticca samutpada*, *dhammas* and *citta* arise together. *Dhammas* conditions *citta*, and *citta* then conditions *dhammas*. **So thinking is *citta* under the influence of strong mental content. The process of assessment may take place within *citta* but the assessment itself is *dhamma*.** It is a similar process with emotion (Fig.1b) but instead of *dhammas* being involved it is now *vedana* that is involved.. Feeling (*vedana*) is the original stimulus. However emotion - being the psychological response to feeling - takes place within *citta*. Emotion is the movement within the psyche

Fig. 1c Non-Discursive Awareness



when it is conditioned by feeling. In terms of *praticca samutpada*, *vedana* and *citta* arise together. *Vedana* conditions *citta*, and then *citta* conditions *vedana*. **So emotion is *citta* under the influence of strong feeling.** This emotion can be skilful - metta or unskilful - craving. And the heart / mind can also be conditioned by bodily awareness to produce an effect that is neither discursive nor emotional (Fig.1c). When in meditation we pay attention to the posture or to relaxation in the body, or to the tangible breath-body in the present moment, that has a certain effect on our awareness. We create a different type of 'container', one that is spacious and in which we are more fully present, within which we can work with our thoughts and emotions. *Kaya* is the stimulation, and awareness is the movement within the psyche conditioned by that, in a positive sense it may be a *samatha* (calming and concentrating) movement, but distraction may be conditioned.

The above is an interactive model based on the four satipatthana. The arrow represents a dominant conditioning link. For instance in Fig.1a the arrow represents *heart / mind* being conditioned by *mental objects*. For introduction to this model see *article shabda* May 2007.

This explanation of **citta** then allows for all the variations of **citta** mentioned in the sutta.

* consciousness with or without lust; with or without hate; with or without ignorance; shrunken state; distracted state; developed state; undeveloped state; state with some other mental state superior to it; state with no other mental state superior to it; concentrated state; unconcentrated state; freed state; and unfreed state of consciousness.

So I began trying to work out which of the views about **citta** was right. But here it seems they all can be included in the conception of **citta**. This explanation allows **citta** to be emotion, thought and awareness, or a combination of all of them.

This way of looking at citta helps us see how thinking, emotion, and bodily awareness work together in meditation. It helps us be clear how say thought works with the **metta bhavana** (Fig.2) - we might stimulate the production of **metta** by first creating a good basis of awareness through attention to posture and bodily awareness, then cultivating ethical sensitivity (spiritual feeling - **samisa vedana**) which will tend to condition the state of **metta** in the heart / mind, and support that further by cultivating mental contents (thoughts) supportive of metta, such as "All beings desire happiness".

Mental Objects as Images and Symbols

It is obvious that not all mental objects are conceptual - we use images in the metta bhavana to stimulate **metta**, and in **sadhana** we certainly use them to stimulate faith in our **yidam** and through that the three jewels, and what about poetic imagery in general? Where a purely conceptual mental object - like the notion of "impermanence" - may not stimulate much feeling, a poetic image like the yidam in the blue sky, or a text like a puja, has the advantage of stimulating our emotions **as well as** our thoughts - of 'getting the emotions on board'. The conceptual content of the puja is as important as the poetry, and in the greatest poetry our reflective and emotive faculties are strongly stimulated at the same time. If we can reflect on such poetry while concentrated in meditation

Fig. 2 Metta Bhavana

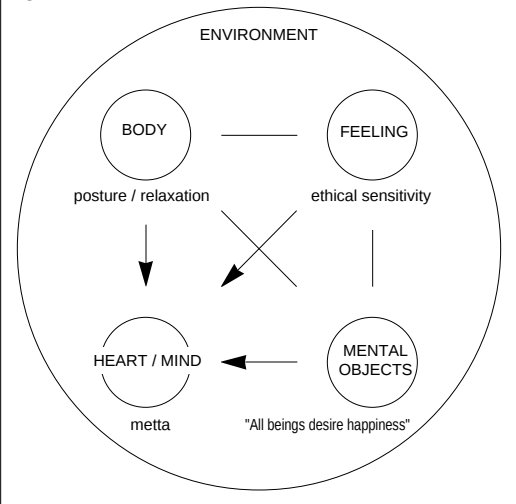
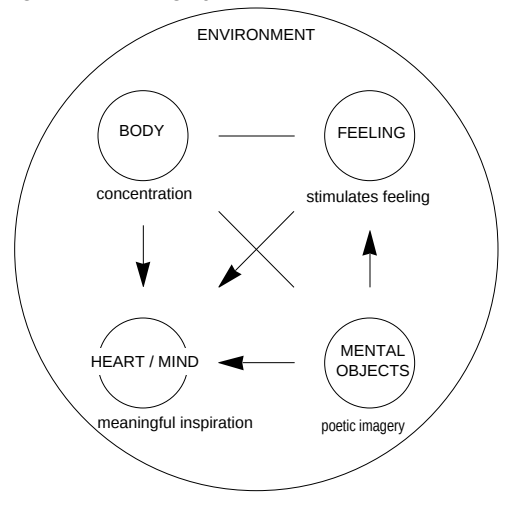


Fig. 3 Poetic Imagery



then even better (Fig.3). Then we are really maximising the effect of changing the heart / mind through thought, emotion and awareness.

Summary

A state of mind in itself it does not have conceptual content. It may arise together with conceptual content - for example when a lustful state of mind and lusty 'mental contents' arise together, each conditioning the other, but like the potter moulding the pot in the Wheel of Life, **citta** is more the shaping of the mind in terms of consciousness (being conscious or distracted,) or in terms of emotion (being positive, defiled, or expansive). The scarcity of commentary on **citta** perhaps reflects the fact that **cittanupassi** is actually hard to talk about because it is largely meditational, is learned through practice, and is mostly a question of developing sensitivity, which like other activities involving sensitivity - e. the Arts - it is difficult to talk about and do justice.

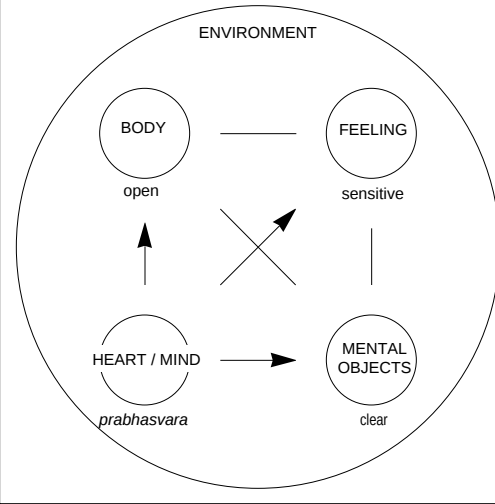
Citta and Pure Awareness

Part of the conceptual problem that comes with the pure awareness, or the 'opening to pure awareness' approach is that **citta** is what the heart / mind is doing at any time in response to experience, it is therefore an **action**. It is **what is going on in you**. The **citta** of an enlightened being is pure in that it is free of defilements. Because being on the transcendental path, they no longer need to make and effort to be aware, emotionally positive or clear, and this is reflected in the phrase **citta** is **prabhasvara** (clear light), where the pure awareness of an arahant has the characteristics of being naturally open (unfixed, empty-natured), clear (knowing, luminous, radiant) and sensitive (compassionate, responsive, free, creative).

We can see in Fig.4 how this might relate to what I have been talking about earlier in this article. The characteristics relate to the body, feeling and mental objects satipatthanas in describing the aware, the emotional and the lucid aspects of enlightened citta. These characteristics can be conceptualised within the four satipatthanas. The problem though is that pure awareness does not exist in isolation apart from the effects of the other satipatthanas on it. Therefore, at the level of enlightenment, the other satipatthanas must also be fully developed.

'Pure' citta must be supported by unwavering insight as well as by perfect ethical sensitivity (there are no worldly feelings due to craving or aversion) and by constant mindfulness in the present moment. In fact all these elements support and maintain each other (Fig.5). It is difficult to see how one can 'open up to pure awareness' except by developing these other satipatthanas. A different way of looking at this comes if we approach it from the angle of the five spiritual faculties, which I think are reasonably correlated with the four satipatthanas (Fig.6)

Fig. 4 Citta is prabhasvara



Mindfulness, as **Perfect Mindfulness (samma sati)**, is one of the eight limbs in the Noble Eightfold Path and one of five 'spiritual faculties' (**panca-indriya**), the others being faith (**saddha**), wisdom (**panna**), energy in pursuit of the good (**viriya**) and concentration (**samadhi**). If these five faculties are completely developed, **buddhahood** is attained (Sn V 48 2.2). When these five spiritual faculties are developed but not as completely developed as in an enlightened person, problems can arise in dealing with the faculties. The stream entrant understands some of the problems. They 'understand as they really are the gratification, the danger and the escape in the case of these five faculties' (Sn V 48 1.2). They understand the importance of mindfulness as a balancing factor (Fig.7), through which the practitioner aims for **indriya-samatta**, the equalization of the faculties (The Survey, 284).

Pure awareness in its full conception, if we accept this correlation, correlates with absolute faith in the three jewels (hence an arahant will have a mind of 'clear light' even in the face of death), but due to the inescapable completion of **indriya-samatta** that mind is inevitably accompanied by absolute wisdom (as well as by perfect **viriya** and **perfect samadhi**, and of course **perfect mindfulness**). Pure awareness as a doctrine then is perhaps imbalanced, if it doesn't focus on the development of these other faculties as well as on awareness and faith. Absolute faith is impossible without its correlate of absolute wisdom.

So where might this all fit with formless meditation, just sitting, Bhante's system, and so on ? I understand Bhante's version of just sitting to be a person not making any effort to focus on an object of meditation whilst maintaining 'postural integrity'. One does not do anything against the flow of ones instincts (as one might do in the mindfulness of breathing against an instinct to distraction, or in the metta bhavana against an instinct to ill will or indifference). And the point of this is to experience some fruits of our practice. When we have been making effort in a meditation in Bhante's system we produce positive karma. By doing just sitting after that we experience some of the fruits of that karma in terms of a sense of togetherness or concentration (**kaya**) or a pleasureable uplifting feeling (**niramisa vedana**). We are essentially 'spending some of our merit', but that gives us a bit of

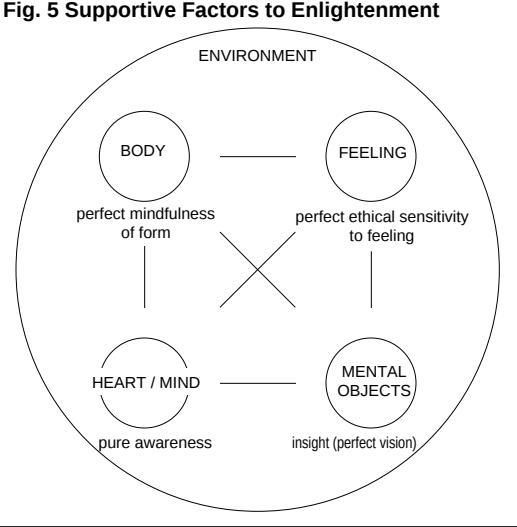


Fig. 6 Correlation with the Foundations of Mindfulness

Spiritual Faculty	Foundation of Mindfulness
Concentration	Body
Energy in Pursuit of the Good	Feeling
Confidence / Trust	Heart / Mind
Wisdom	Mental Objects

encouragement in allowing us to enjoy some fruit of our practice. Awareness here is pure in the sense of being pure of making effort.

The second kind of pure awareness, being at the culmination of the Dzogchen / Mahamudra system, is obviously informed by insight. Perhaps we can relate this kind of pure awareness to Bhante's just sitting in the way that the transcendental eightfold path relates to the mundane eightfold path. For a being on the transcendental eightfold path, ethics, meditation and wisdom naturally unfold without them having to make a conscious effort, on account of their transcendental insight. This kind of pure awareness like the first is pure of effort, but this time due to being supported by insight. One could call Bhante's version of just sitting, mundane pure awareness - where one experiences a radiant positive state of mind as a result of temporarily reaping the fruits of ones karma, and the second transcendental pure awareness, pure because one is reaping the fruits of insight.

Strictly speaking, awareness is a **kama**, so it is more accurate to say in the case of mundane pure awareness that one experiences the fruits of effort as pleasant **niramisa vedana** which then supports a **citta** informed by mundane pure awareness. In the case of transcendental pure awareness, ones **citta** is pure because it is free of defilements, and that is mutually supported by insight (**jnana**), by the bliss of release (**niramisa niramisatara vedana**), and by direct tangible experience of enlightenment (**bodhi**), all of which perpetually support each other in the action of **praticca samutpada**.

Fig. 7 The Five Spiritual Faculties

